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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002700

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SUBJECT: CODEL BAIRD DISCUSSES SECURITY WITH DEFENSE AND
INTERIOR MINISTERS

Classified By: POL-MIL COUNSELOR MARCIE B. RIES, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In separate meetings with the Ministers of the Interior and Defense on August 11, Reps. Brian Baird (D-WA), Ralph Hall (R-TX), and Christopher Shays (R-CT) asked for the opinions of the ministers regarding the current situation in Iraq and the path ahead. Each minister acknowledged the sacrifices being made by Coalition Forces and highlighted the progress made in reducing terrorism and sectarian violence during the last six months. Interior Minister Bolani explained how the incorporation of Sunni tribesmen and volunteers into the Iraqi Security Forces in Anbar and elsewhere was a model the GOI was planning to follow elsewhere. Defense Minister Abdul Qadir focused on the success of the recent Iraqi-led operation to protect a major Shiite pilgrimage. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) At a meeting in the Embassy Annex, Interior Minister Bolani recounted that in the six months before February of this year, 4,250 unidentified bodies had been found in Baghdad. Since the beginning of the Baghdad Security Plan in February, only 560 such bodies had been found, he said. Bolani praised the cooperation and the stream of volunteers which the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), both Army and police, were receiving from Sunni tribes. According to Bolani, the combined efforts of Sunni tribes and volunteers and the ISF had improved security in some of the most difficult areas of Iraq, including Anbar, Mosul, and Diyala. The Baghdad-Amman highway was safer for travelers due to an increased local police presence in Anbar province, he noted. Bolani explained that the GOI was trying to repeat this model all over Iraq.

¶3. (C) Bolani denied the suggestion that PM Maliki feared incorporating Sunni elements into the ISF, pointing out that the PM had formed a committee of intelligence, MOD, MOI, and NSA officials to screen potential recruits. Bolani saw no reason for concern about recruiting Sunni volunteers and tribesmen, since they would be controlled and paid by the GOI and could be fired if necessary. He made the case that the MOI was not Shia-dominated by pointing out that his five deputies consist of a Sunni Kurd, a Sunni Turkmen, a Sunni Arab, and two Shiite Arabs.

¶4. (C) At a meeting with Defense Minister Abdul Qadir at the MOD, Rep. Baird began the meeting by explaining that the delegation wanted to gain as much insight as possible into the situation in Iraq before September, when Congress would receive its next major progress report on Iraq. Abdul Qadir emphasized improvements in the Baghdad security situation since the beginning of the surge in February. He highlighted the recently concluded Iraqi-led security operation to

protect Shiite processions to the Kadhimiyyah shrine in Baghdad. Abdul Qadir proudly reported that, due to a coordinated effort under the leadership of the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC) and with the support of MNF-I, there was not a single security incident affecting the 3 million pilgrims participating in the processions. COMMENT: MNF-I leadership confirms that this security operation was a major milestone in demonstrating ISF capability to lead the planning and execution of a corps-level operation (septel). Estimates of the number of pilgrims involved range from less than 1 million to 3 million. END COMMENT.

¶5. (C) Abdul Qadir next addressed the situation outside Baghdad. In Anbar and Diyala, he said, the ISF and coalition forces were turning the tables on the terrorists. The southern part of Iraq was not suffering from terrorism, but rather from what he termed political combat, between militias sponsored by political parties. He assessed most of the South as a green or yellow zone. Regarding Basrah, however, he had some concerns due to the influence of Iran and some of the Gulf states. He vowed to cooperate with MNF-I to turn the situation in Basrah around.

¶6. (C) Abdul Qadir then discussed expanding the force structure and capabilities of the Iraqi Army. He expressed concern regarding delays in using the FMS program and stated his desire to increase aviation, logistics, and maintenance assets in order to lessen Iraqi reliance on U.S. forces for these capabilities. Creating a new Iraqi Army from scratch had only been possible with the help of MNSTC-I and the many Military Transition Teams (MTTs) which were embedded in Iraqi units.

¶7. (C) Rep. Hall assured Abdul Qadir that the U.S. saw Iraq as an important ally and that the President was committed to

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helping Iraq. Abdul Qadir replied that too many political leaders in Iraq were not focused on building a strong nation, but were rather echoing to the voices of the street calling for the coalition to leave, while at the same time privately indicating that they did not want this to happen yet. Rep. Shays indicated his belief that there needed to be a reasonable timeline for the withdrawal of coalition forces that would assure Iraqis that we would neither stay too long nor depart tomorrow. Abdul Qadir replied that the GOI was making such plans with the coalition so that, as Iraq was capable of standing on its own, Coalition Forces could withdraw.

¶8. (C) CODEL Baird did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing post.
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